

## California Institute for Rural Studies: California Agricultural Vision CDFA Listening Session, Sacramento, May 29, 2008

I'm Ron Storchlic, Executive Director of the California Institute for Rural Studies, a nonprofit organization based in Davis, CA. We conduct applied research promoting a more sustainable food system in California.

Our vision for California agriculture in 2030 is for it to be sustainable in all meanings of the word. Many industries are increasingly adopting a "triple-bottom line" approach, in which success is measured not only in terms of dollars and cents, but in terms of issues that we have come to realize are vital for the long-term success of any endeavor. In that sense, our vision for California agriculture is one that is **ecologically balanced, economically viable and socially just.**

I'd like to address our vision for a more **socially just** agricultural system in California in 2030. This vision includes vibrant rural communities, economically successful farms of all sizes, access to healthy and nutritious food for all Californians, and just working and living conditions for the approximately 1.5 million agricultural workers and accompanying family members that bring food to our tables on a daily basis.

We envision a California agriculture that offers agricultural workers and their family members...

- A living wage
- Safe and healthy working conditions
- Access to benefits that many of us already enjoy, such as health insurance, paid time off and retirement
- Safe, decent and affordable housing
- Clean air and water
- Safe communities and good schools
- The right to advocate for improved conditions without fear of retribution
- The right to live and work legally in the United States

Providing good conditions for agricultural workers is a win-win-win situation, for growers, farm workers and agricultural communities. Research conducted by CIRS has found that providing good working conditions for farm workers offers numerous benefits for growers. Some of these benefits include reduced labor shortages and access to a skilled, stable and knowledgeable workforce.

At the same time, consumers are increasingly seeking food that is produced in line with their moral and ethical values. For example, the 2007 Produce Marketing Association survey reveals that 55% of consumers identified the social responsibility of produce suppliers as a key factor driving their purchasing decisions. Similarly, the Hartmann Group 2007 Sustainability Survey found that over half of consumers consider safe working conditions and good wages and benefits as key factors behind their purchasing decisions. Growing consumer interest in good labor conditions offers farmers important opportunities to access niche markets. At the same time, as the requirement to provide

good farm labor conditions becomes increasingly “mainstream” – as 2 growing numbers of codes of conduct indicate – growers doing so will have important market advantages.

Finally, the provision of good farmworker conditions has important public policy benefits. Access to health insurance, safe and healthy working conditions and the ability to afford healthier food and safe housing will result in healthy, thriving and civically engaged agricultural communities throughout California. That in turn has the potential to significantly reduce public expenditures on health care, criminal justice, etc.

A number of key challenges must be addressed to achieve this vision:

- Since many aspects of this vision do not come directly under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, it will be essential that CDFA work closely with other agencies and stakeholders responsible for addressing these issues, e.g. CAL-OSHA, the Department of Industrial Relations, the Departments of Health, Housing and Community Development, etc.
- An additional challenge we must address is the ability of growers to receive a fair price for their product, that will allow them to be economically viable while providing good farm labor conditions. I have spoken with many very well-intentioned growers that would like to offer better conditions for farmworkers – both because it’s the right thing to do and because it’s good for business. Nonetheless, the current economics of farming do not allow many of these growers to do so. We must seek creative mechanisms to allow farmers to receive a fair price for their products, so they can thrive and offer good wages and benefits for agricultural workers. Just as programs such as the Conservation Security Program reward growers for farming in environmentally sustainable ways that care for the earth, so must we seek creative ways to allow growers to farm in socially just and sustainable ways that care for the people that work the land. Doing so can only benefit us all.

Thank you.